Welcome to King County Elections

King County is the 14th most populated county and home to one third of Washington's voters.

In recent years, King County Elections has benefited from focus, oversight and dedicated resources. The result has been progressive change and improvement in the administration of elections, including consolidating three of our offices into this building in December 2007. Along with improved communications, the movement of ballots in the new facility is restricted to one floor, ultimately enhancing ballot security.

King County Elections is staffed by 61 full time, dedicated, hard working individuals who have a strong sense of pride and commitment to the work they perform. Working in collaboration with the Executive and Council, Elections staff have continually worked to establish open and transparent processes along with streamlined and enhanced work procedures.

This building was designed to encourage public observation. Use this self-guided tour to visit public spaces on the first and second floors.

FIRST FLOOR

The first floor houses the administrative offices, Voter Services, Election Operations and Geographic Information System sections. When King County transitions entirely to vote by mail, the first floor will also host a regional voting center.

King County
Elections

Floor plan labels

Entrance

City Cafe

Lunch Room

Restrooms

Phone Bank

Training Room

Regional Voting Center

Check In

Poll Worker Coordination

Election Distribution Center
This warehouse space will be used to house regional voting center equipment when King County conducts all-mail voting in 2009. Currently this space is used to receive incoming absentee ballots and general delivery. Polling place equipment is currently stored in Seattle.

Mail Room

Voter Services

Election Operations

GIS

Technical Services

Vote by Mail Transition Team

Administration

▪ Future home of the **Regional Voting Center.** The regional voting center will be open 20 days prior to each election and will offer in-person, accessible voting. This area is currently being used for security and acceptance testing of new tabulation equipment and will serve as the early voting location for the primary and General Election.

▪ **Voter Services** is responsible for maintaining the registration records and interacting with nearly 1.1 million voters. In Washington State voters can register by mail, in person or online.

Voter Services staff enter data into King County's voter registration database, where the information is then uploaded into a statewide voter registration database. Voters are mailed a voter notification card after they register to vote.

Voter Services is also responsible for inactivated voters, cancellation of voter registrations, absentee voter request, over the counter absentee ballots, ballot signature challenges, address confidentiality program, process of provisional ballots, voter data request, voter registration database list maintenance reports, petition processing and phone bank.

▪ **Election Operations** is responsible for all aspects of implementing elections in King County, from designing the layout of the ballot to recruiting and training poll workers. They are the direct contact with jurisdictions and candidates regarding resolutions. They produce local voter's pamphlets each year in English and Chinese, run a poll worker help line on Election Day and are responsible for a post-Election audit of all 398 polling places.

The Federal Voting Rights Act requires King County to produce all election materials in both English and Chinese. King County minority language assistance team translates all election material, maintains a Chinese language hotline and hires bilingual poll workers.

In addition to maintaining lease agreements for polling places, the Poll Worker Coordination Office recruits, hires and trains staff for up to six elections each year, about 4,000 poll workers for each countywide election.

▪ **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)** creates, analyzes, and maintains data to place voters in select voting districts. The geography of King County is very dynamic and composed of 186 jurisdictions and minor taxing district boundaries. The Elections GIS team is solely responsible for more than 200 separate data layers.

Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act requires counties to provide language assistance if more than 5 percent of voting age citizens in a jurisdiction are members of a single-language minority group who do not "speak or understand English adequately enough to participate in the electoral process."

SECOND FLOOR

The second floor houses the County's mail ballot processing operations. Security restricts access to authorized employees only, as this is where the votes are tabulated and the ballots stored.

The single, enclosed and transparent ballot processing and counting floor is surrounded by a secured public observation loop.

Sheriff deputies are hired to monitor the ballot processing floor during working hours when voted ballots are processed and opened, typically for 35 days, from the time ballots are received until certification.

Absentee ballots are mailed 20 days before Election Day and must be post-marked by Election Day. Overseas and military voters are mailed their ballots even earlier to ensure enough mail transit time.

Political party observers are hired and paid by King County Elections to monitor the work that is done day-in and day-out throughout this process. These men and women are an important part of our checks and balances and help ensure laws and procedures are followed by asking important questions. Observers are built into our security processes at each step of the process.

Provisional ballots are alternatives to regular ballots that are provided to voters whose names do not appear in the poll book or who do not present required forms of voter identification. Following Election Day, these ballots are verified and reconciled. A provisional ballot is only counted after a thorough review to determine that the individual is registered and eligible to vote.

Step Two: Signature Verification
Before any ballot is counted, the signature on every returned ballot envelope is visually compared with the voter's signature on file, typically from their registration form. Trained specialists look for groupings and clusters of similarities, like letter height and spacing. If the signatures are a match, the ballot packet is approved to move forward to opening.

Mismatching signatures are not usual. Approximately 3 percent of ballots returned in each election have their signatures challenged. While there are many reasons this could occur, common reasons include the length of time that has passed since the voter first registered to vote, or a voter initialing or simply forgetting to sign. These issues are all resolved differently and the voter is contacted by mail and by telephone. Voters have until the evening before certification to correct their signature issue if they want their ballot to be counted.

Step Three: Opening
Once the identity of the registered voter is confirmed in step two, ballot packets are sent to opening where the ballot envelopes are opened and the ballots are inspected.
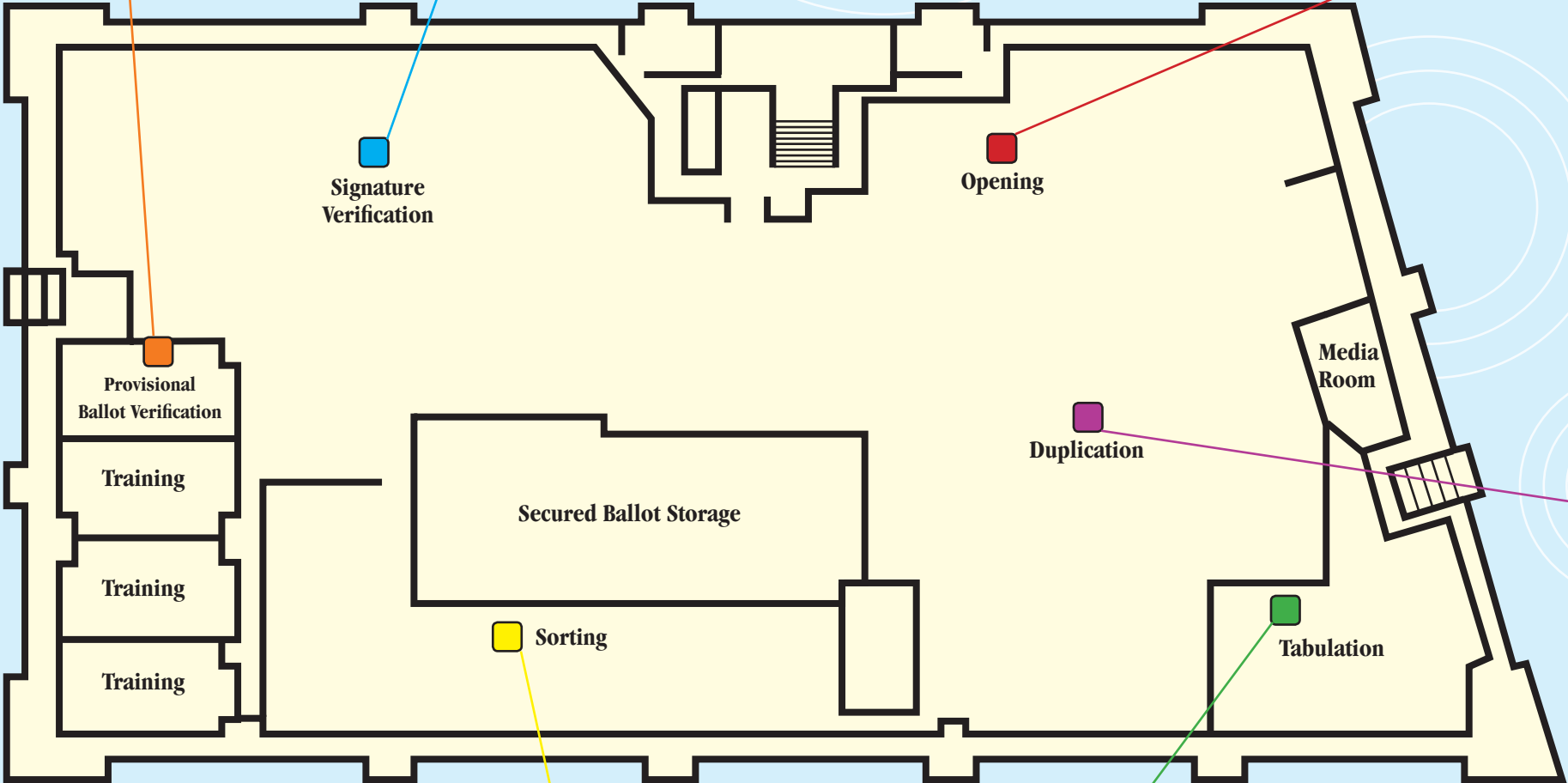
Opening is a three step process:

1 The security envelope, containing the voted ballot, is removed from the signature envelope and separated.

2 Once all signature envelopes have been emptied and set aside, the security envelope is opened and the ballot extracted.

3 A 100 percent visual inspection of the ballot is performed. Ballots are the pulled if there are any stray marks that could affect tabulation, if the voter changed their mind and made a correction, or uses the wrong color of pen or pencil. Those pulled ballots are sent to duplication. Ballots that are physically ready for tabulation proceed there.

When King County conducts all elections by mail next year, voters will be able to track their ballot through opening and confirm that their ballot was extracted and sent to tabulation.

Step Four: Duplication
Ballots sent to duplication typically contain random markings, a pen color that cannot be read by the tabulation equipment, a change in voter selection, or physical damage that would prevent from being run through the tabulation equipment.

King County uses the Voter Intent Manual created by the Secretary of State's Office to ensure consistency when duplicating ballots. Ballots where voter intent is not clear are forwarded to the Canvassing Board. Once duplicated, the original ballot is securely stored.

When King County moves to all-mail voting in 2009, the new tabulation equipment will allow staff to electronically duplicate the ballot image. The number of people you see here will be replaced by a handful of trained operators.

Step One: Sorting
Returned ballots are delivered to King County Elections where they are sorted by legislative district in batches of 200 to 400 ballot packets. Each ballot packet contains one voted ballot inside of a security envelope which is placed inside a return envelope. This sorting process was recently brought in-house, using new, state-of-the-art Pitney Bowes mail sorting equipment the county purchased in anticipation of the transition to countywide voting by mail.

Step Five: Tabulation
Ballots cast at the polls are counted at the polls and uploaded here after the polls close. Absentee ballots are counted here beginning on Election Day at 7 a.m.

When King County moves to all-mail voting, these machines will be replaced by 15 higher capacity machines designed for a central count environment.

Limited access is given to the tabulation server room. This space is monitored by closed-circuit security cameras and log-ins require two people with different passwords.

Floor plan labels:

- Signature Verification
- Opening
- Provisional Ballot Verification
- Training
- Training
- Training
- Secured Ballot Storage
- Media Room
- Duplication
- Sorting
- Tabulation